



THE HULMEVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2024 Second Quarter Edition

# TOWN CRIER

April-May-June 2024

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## Mark Your Calendar

- April 10 Hulmeville Historical Society  
50<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party at Johnson Hall
- May 25 Memorial Day Parade

## Hulmeville Happenings

### SOUP OFF RESULTS

We missed a couple of years due to Covid, but the community didn't forget what a great event this is. It was a chilly rainy day, but the tables were packed all day at the Neshamony Methodist Church. Thank you to all our soup makers, our soup tasters, the Neshamony Methodist Church, and everyone who helped make our Soup Off a huge success!

### Congratulations to our winners!!

- 1st- Lori Fuss - Bacon cheddar gnocchi  
2nd- Dan Mandolesi- Taco Soup  
3rd- Dorothy Ometanski- Taco Soup

### Hulmeville Historical Society OCI Night in February?

Yes, we have had a great time at the OCI every year in July and decided why not have some fun in the cold, so we added a second OCI night and enjoyed good food and friends in February with proceeds from the evening benefiting the HHS in its efforts to build a strong community. There was a great turnout, and we thank everyone who attended.

## Birthday Party - The HHS is 50!

Read more about this in the 'A Little bit of history' section but make sure you mark your calendar for the birthday party at Johnson Hall Coffee House on April 10<sup>th</sup> at 7 PM. We will have a historical slideshow looping and a chance to view documents and objects from the Hulmeville archives along with cake, coffee, and Johnson Hall Coffee House waffle treats.

It's time to JOIN the HHS. Annual membership goes from April 1 to March 31. So, if you are already a member it's time to rejoin. We always need and welcome new members so, please take this party as an opportunity to come and join us! A Membership form is attached.

## Strong Box Back in Town

Hulmeville was the home of the first bank in Bucks County. John Hulme, a member of the PA legislature, had the bank located in his son George's home at 2 Water Street. This is one of the oldest buildings in town, dating back to the mid 1700s. The bank operated there from 1814 to late 1823 but then it was moved to Bristol. When the bank moved, they took all its property including an artistically designed iron strong box. In recent year's this was displayed at the Wells Fargo Branch on Radcliffe Street in Bristol. However, in February, Mercy Ingraham noticed that the Bristol branch was closing. She notified the Hulmeville Historical Society and thankfully, with the generosity of Wells Fargo Bank, we



have been able to bring this amazing piece of Hulmeville History back to town.

WE WILL HAVE THIS ON DISPLAY AT OUR BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR ALL TO SEE!!! We will also have some paper notes and other artifacts from the bank on display.

The HHS sends a special thank you to Mercy Ingraham. Without her understanding of Hulmeville History this unique artifact may have been lost

### The Hulmeville Historical Society Meeting

We meet at Borough Hall on the second Wednesday of each month at 7:00. **(Except this month – Birthday Party Johnson Hall!!!)**. The meetings are open to the public. (No scheduled meeting in July and December.) At each meeting we discuss the planning of upcoming events as well as some topic from Hulmeville History. Residents are also welcome to come with questions about Hulmeville history that we will try to answer. Remember that annual memberships have expired on March 31 so if you haven't already done so, please submit your membership form.

### Cat's Meow



### Hulmeville In the News

The Bucks County Herald, a wonderful free newspaper, recently invited us to talk about Hulmeville history in a series of 4 articles. In case you missed them you can find them here. <https://buckscountyherald.com/heralding-our-history/>

We want to thank the Bucks County Herald for this opportunity and encourage everyone to support this local newspaper.

**Continuing Prayers-** Our Borough President Tom Wheeler is fighting some health issues, and we wish him and his family all our support and prayers.

**Condolences –** To the Harris family on the loss of Jeanne Harris.

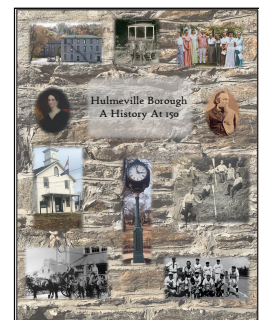
### Thank you!

Thank you to Tim James and the staff at Johnson Hall Coffee House for hosting our Birthday Party!

**NOTE:** If you have any information, you would like us to add to the acknowledgement section, please contact Joe Coleman at [jcole1052019@gmail.com](mailto:jcole1052019@gmail.com). Also, please let Joe know if we have any mistakes in your name and address on the mailing.

Our new Cat's Meow piece - 200 Main Street, is **now** available in limited numbers. The cost is \$25.00 Contact Mary Johnson at 215-757-8412 for more information. Also, we still have some older pieces available for sale.

**Hulmeville Borough – A History at 150** is available for sale in both softcover (\$25) and hardcover (\$40). Contact Joe Coleman at [jcole1052019@gmail.com](mailto:jcole1052019@gmail.com) to get your copy.





## A little bit of Hulmeville History – History of the Hulmeville Historical Society

The roots of the Hulmeville Historical Society can be found in the fertile soil cultivated by the Hulmeville Centennial Committee of 1972. The *Hulmeville Borough Centennial* book contains a section on the history of the Borough Council. The last paragraph of that section states, “At the meeting of the Council in March 1971 the Secretary reminded the Councilmen that the Borough would be 100 years old in March of 1972. The General Chairman of a Centennial Committee, Donald Haefner was selected and accepted. The committee members were named, and the big celebration was under way.”

They couldn't have known at the time what a significant event this celebration would be because not only did they organize many fun and enjoyable events for the community in 1972 but one can draw a direct line between these events and the formation of the Hulmeville Historical Society, state and federal recognition of the Hulmeville Historical District, many community improvement projects and countless events that have created a new sense of pride among the people of Hulmeville Borough.

While many people living in Hulmeville in 1970, were aware of the advantages of living in this small and close-knit community there was a perception among some that Hulmeville's best days were in the past. The mills along the creek were closed. The creek itself had suffered significant environmental damage. The post office and school were closed. The *Hulmeville Borough Centennial* book reported that organized baseball had collapsed. The store in Johnson's Hall had gone through a series of owners that all struggled to succeed among the competition from larger corporate stores that were built during the massive development of lower Bucks County.

In this atmosphere, the members of the Centennial Committee began their work but there were some who doubted that efforts would be successful. In June of 1971 the Philadelphia Inquirer printed a lengthy article describing the planned Centennial Celebration entitled, *Fete Sentiment in Hulmeville: Ho-Hum Ville*. In a section of this article with the subheading “Nothing Much Here” the reporter quoted one resident at Kemler's store in Johnson's Hall stating, “There just ain't nothing much here. I don't see any use in putting on airs.” Another resident said, “I think it's going to be a failure. We can barely take care of getting our children to school.”

The reporter described Hulmeville stating that one thing that characterizes Hulmeville is its humility. He explained that the Borough is only 3/8 of a square mile and that “somehow, as residential development sprawled all over Lower Bucks, it managed to miss Hulmeville...Once dependent on mills along the Neshaminy Creek, Hulmeville is primarily a commuter town.” The author concludes with this passage, “Hulmeville does have some Bucks County firsts, however. The first bank was there. So was the first newspaper. And it was the ancestral home of Joseph R. Grundy. The bank has moved. The newspaper moved. Even Grundy's parents moved. Nothing ever happened in Hulmeville that shook the world and the little mill town nestled in the valley of the Neshaminy Creek is inhabited mainly by people who like it that way.”

There can be no doubt that this unflattering article on Hulmeville and the planned celebration motivated organizers to ensure the success of the Centennial Celebration. The first Centennial Committee Meeting took place on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1971, and they began a year long process of planning events that would at the end of May in 1972. Notes from that meeting show that the following subcommittees and committee heads. Chairman – Donald Haefner, Secretary-Treasurer – Harriet W. Black, Finance – Kenneth W. Clark \*, Publicity – Elmer C. Hampton, Hospitality – Patricia Manning, Historian – Howard Martin, Events – Ferdinand Reetz, Display Material – Margaret Still \* Later Dave Harris took over the head of the Finance Committee.

The **spirit of '72** led to the formation of the Hulmeville Historical Society which has been serving the community in countless ways ever since it was started in March of 1974. There were only three people in attendance at the first meeting which took place at Sharon Smock's house on Lincoln Avenue. Sharon Smock, Betty Shapcott and Mary Jackson met to “discuss the feasibility of Hulmeville having an historical society. They decided to give it a try and began calling neighbors and friends to ask them to attend the next meeting at the Borough Hall. The Mayor, Mark Shapcott reported to Council in March that plans were being made to form an historical and ecological group.

Sharon Smock was elected first President of the Hulmeville Historical Society. The society started right away with efforts to improve the environment by organizing efforts to clean up trash in the community and along the creek. They also began planning annual Hulmeville Day events that were held on Memorial Day weekend.

The Historical Society organized senior citizens lunches which, no doubt helped to encourage discussion of Borough history. Historic walking tours were also organized. June Robinson used research gathered by Historic Society to write descriptions of the historic homes and businesses. **(We must note here that, this year, June Robinson will turn 99 years old and is still active as the corresponding secretary for the Hulmeville Historical Society!)** Don Haefner became the Society's archivist and began doing research, collecting documents, and reaching out to residents as well as those who had moved away to create the Hulmeville Historical Society's archives. Thankfully, Don continued this work for decades as these archives are the main source of information for our society.

Another fundraising project that the Historical Society created was the Old Town Flea Market. The first one was held in 1980. This annual event has been a huge success since it was started and it still occurs on the last Saturday of September every year.

The Hulmeville Historical Society group made it clear from the start that it was not a political organization. Its bylaws were very clear in the purpose of the organization stating, “The following are the purposes for which this society has been organized: to stimulate the interest in the history of Hulmeville and of the United States in general... to encourage and to take part in the restoration, preservation, or appropriate commemoration of dwellings buildings and places of historic interest in Hulmeville... to foster by example and society projects, an appreciation for and an interest in the environment of our community. No substantial part of the

activities of the society shall be the carrying on of propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation and the society shall not participate in or intervene in any political campaign.”

Even though the Historical Society did not get involved in politics, it did play a role in keeping development at bay and preserving the historic integrity of Hulmeville. In a June 1974 article in the *Evening Bulletin*, Sharon Smock said, “The small-town residential quality is why people come to Hulmeville,” and that the Historical Society was formed to “preserve Hulmeville as it is and to oppose multi-family developments.” The quote shows that the Historical Society was not just trying to preserve what was here but also to prevent future development that might undermine the historical integrity of the Borough.

From its earliest meetings, the Hulmeville Historical Society discussed working to get Hulmeville’s historical significance recognized at the county, state, and national level. This recognition would help to protect Hulmeville’s history and build pride in the community. The first success came in the fall of 1978 when 2 Water Street, site of the Farmers Bank of Bucks County and 107 Green Street, Edward Hicks home, were placed on the Bucks County Historic Registry.

One threat to the historic buildings was the decaying bridge that crossed the creek to Bensalem. Some were proposing a four-lane highway through the center of town. In August of 1981, the Bucks County Courier Times magazine called *Accent* ran a feature story on Hulmeville. The front-page title was, “Hulmeville Preserves its Past to Assure its Future.” Inside was an article entitled, “How Hulmeville Uses Historical District to Prevent Development.” The article explained that six members of the Hulmeville Historical Society had been hard at work for over a year to gain the recognition. Barbara Claus, the Historical Society’s historic districting chairperson lived at 200 Main Street. She is quoted in the article as saying, “Why are we doing this? To keep the town from changing disastrously should PennDOT decide to re-build the bridge and build a big, wide highway going through town.”

When the bridge plans were revealed, residents were relieved to realize that the bridge construction would not change the nature of Hulmeville but a new threat to the historic district emerged. Businesses in Johnson Hall had a difficult time in the economic environment of the 70s and 80s and the building fell into disrepair. On April 7<sup>th</sup> HHS president, Howard Martin attended the Borough Council meeting to report that there were rumors that the owner of Johnson’s Hall was planning to tear it down and set up a 7-11.

At the next Historical Society meeting, President Howard Martin explained the Society had applied for National Registration for Historical Districting and that Johnson Hall was at the heart of the district. Mr. Martin stated that the Society and the residents of Hulmeville opposed the plan to demolish the historic building. In August of 1986 Mayor Shapcott was notified that the historic district was placed on the National Registry of Historic Places. This designation did not, by itself save the building but it did help improve the chances of saving Johnson Hall.

In September the developer attended the Council meeting with a slight change of plans. Johnson’s Hall would still be demolished but now a representative from WaWa Stores was with him and they planned to lease space to WaWa after demolition. At the November meeting of the Historical Society, Review Board representatives asked for information that might be used to preserve the building. The Review Board suggested a report from an architect might be helpful. Historical Society member Nick Lodise said he knew an architect who would do the work. Secretary June Robinson motioned that the Historical Society pay the fee and it was quickly approved. The situation around Johnson’s Hall remained precarious throughout 1987.

In March of 1988, Council received the recommendation of the Architectural Review Board, based on the architect’s recommendation, which was to deny the permit to demolish Johnson Hall. At the June Historical Society meeting Howard Martin reported that WaWa had backed out of the deal after Council President, Ira Romberger, had written to the company explaining Hulmeville’s opposition to the demolition of Johnson Hall. Johnson Hall was preserved, and the community came to see the value of historic preservation thanks to the far-sighted residents who founded our society 50 years ago.

The Hulmeville Historical Society has served our community in countless ways since it was founded in 1974. We organize the flea market, holiday celebrations, community picnics, park improvement projects and many other events. We hope you will join us as we continue and expand these activities over the next 50 years.

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## Join Us! Hulmeville Historical Society Membership April 1, 2024-March 31, 2025

Please complete this form and mail it with your check payment to:

**Hulmeville Historical Society**

**Attention: Steve Miszencin**

**321 Main Street**

**Hulmeville, PA 19047**

\_\_\_\_\_ **\$12 Individual Membership**

\_\_\_\_\_ **\$24 Family Membership**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Free Membership People 75 and over\***

\_\_\_\_\_ **\$50 Business Membership**

\_\_\_\_\_ **\$500 Lifetime Membership**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

\* IN ORDER FOR LIFETIME AND SENIORS TO STAY ON THE ACTIVE MAILING LIST, YOU MUST RETURN YOUR FORM For further information or to volunteer at any event email [SMiszencin@gmail.com](mailto:SMiszencin@gmail.com)